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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W (JHUNTER/ESPRUILL)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/22/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SL](#)

SUBJECT: COUPS RUN THE GAME: SIERRA LEONE BETWEEN A ROCK
AND A HARD PLACE

REF: STATE 1631

Classified By: CDA Glenn Fedzer for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

11. (C) Summary: CDA discussed reftel demarche topic with Foreign Minister Zainab Bangura on January 16. Bangura's response reflected the constant struggle facing Sierra Leone to maintain democratic principles and regional commitments in the face of sub-regional threats to peace and security. The Foreign Minister reminded CDA that Sierra Leone has the highest concentration of Guineans outside of Guinea, and that further problems in that country will have a sizable impact here. The Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) is thus advocating for ECOWAS and AU bodies to support Guinea's stabilization without using economic sanctions or other tools that may sow further seeds of discontent. The GoSL may find it hard to maintain this position in the face of international opposition, particularly if the junta continues to demonstrate only a rhetorical commitment to civilian rule. End Summary.

12. (C) In a January 16 meeting, Foreign Minister Bangura told CDA that the GoSL does not have the option to disengage the coup leaders, but will encourage them to work through ECOWAS frameworks. She agreed with Guinea's suspension from ECOWAS, because "a coup is a coup...there is no such thing as a good coup or a bad coup." However, Bangura is clearly concerned that pushing too hard could have deleterious effects. She mentioned, for example, information suggesting that only 50% of the Guinean military support the coup, creating the potential for a counter-coup in the future. She also mentioned Qadhafi and Wade, saying that pushing Guinea too hard will force them in the direction of undesirable influences. With the financial support of Libya, Guinea could easily turn its back on regional and sub-regional institutions, and the principles on which these institutions were built.

13. (C) The Foreign Minister stated that President Koroma supports the ECOWAS position, and feels that the coup leaders should be given no more than two years to conduct a democratic election. Bangura also informed CDA that Koroma is advocating for Guinea to become a UN Peacebuilding Commission country, and also told coup leader Camara that "we will do everything we can to work with you." Bangura seemed exasperated by the President's words of apparent support, particularly in light of Camara's cabinet selection, of which a third are military officers. She hinted that the GoSL had been told that the cabinet would be consist entirely of civilians.

14. (C) Comment: Bangura said that the GoSL will not issue public statements about the Guinean situation before the upcoming AU Summit. Though the GoSL wants to support democracy and fears giving the coup leaders a semblance of legitimacy that could create a precedent for other coups in the region, their main priority continues to be maintaining peace and stability in Sierra Leone--and that requires

stability in Guinea. Preserving this appears to require acting as a quiet advocate on Guinea's behalf in various fora, particularly on the issue of preserving development assistance. Preventing another insurgency or a Libyan ascension of influence is their goal, though the window for continuing to be seen as both Guinea's emissary and a champion of democracy is likely starting to close. As the junta takes provocative steps, such as military cabinet appointments, that erode credibility with the international community, the GoSL may feel the need to be Guinea's apologist in an effort to maintain peace within and across its borders. Though clearly in an unenviable predicament, Sierra Leone could some day be forced to choose between it's hard-won image as a post-conflict country that respects and preserves democracy and human rights, or publicly aligning with the coup leaders to ensure that Guinean misfortune stays in Guinea. Post expects that the GoSL, if pressed, will choose the latter. End Comment.

FEDZER